Resistance to Vision: Searching, Sifting, Finding, Seeing
Mission Statement:

Manifest enhances the role of art and design in society by cultivating and focusing the transformative power of creativity in the visual arts. Manifest benefits people in the global and local community, including professionals, students, and the public, by creating quality-centered experiences focused on contemporary visual arts and related activities in the context of creative exploration.
Resistance to Vision: Searching, Sifting, Finding, Seeing

Curated by Dana Saulnier

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Erin Enderle
Nicole Foran
J Brett Grill
Kenneth Hall
Yumiko Irei-Gokce
Irina Koukhanova
David Chapman Lindsay
Nickolus Meisel
Armin Mersmann
Joseph Morzuch
Kurt Nicaise
Yvonne Petkus
Stephanie Sypsa
Kamila Szczesna
Art Werger
Margaret Whiting

November 9 - December 7, 2007
Resistance to Vision as an organizing principle for this exhibition arises out of a number of ideas and observations— all having to do with thinking about creative practices. A lot of this comes directly out of doing creative work, as well as helping others find their own artistic voice. The same thinking also lends itself to an argument that distinguishes the visual in the face of contemporary theories that center on language. For several generations much theory has taken the operation of language as the fundamental framework for understanding cultural forms. The “linguistic turn” in theory is the prevalent mode of postmodernism. This project compiles a set of ideas meant to position “resistance” and “blindness” as productive orientations to the visual.

These ideas arise directly from my creative life in the studio. When I am working I am almost always in a situation where I am not seeing what I want to see. What I hope to see is an artwork capable of fulfilling its being, that is, seeing an artwork that is engaging
formally, emotionally and intellectually. The truth is I spend ninety percent or more of my cre-
ative time not seeing this. Most days I am happy to catch a glimpse indicating such a thing could
happen. Creative persons, poets, writers, visual artists, have all described this situation again
and again. They continually give evidence of practices where time is regulated by rhythms of
“blindness” coupled to vision. They place themselves into practices that are as much about
resistance as realization.

Secondly, the idea of Resistance to Vision arises from my reading life, and is a response to the-
ory dominated art discourses that are so often distant from the practices of creative persons.
Such reading is of course the multi headed monster we so frequently confront whenever we pick
up an exhibition catalog or pay attention to the cadre of voices who set out to write around art.
An important example is the legacy of semiotics, where an image is understood as a floating
sign, disconnected from any intention of a creator, and seen most effectively as an operant in
social power structures. This method has had a long lasting and pervasive influence on those
who think about visual art. Multiple collectives of academics are vested in this paradigm. At
present it is an institutional given, prominent in how artists are educated, in how art is exhibit-
ed, in how art is written about, and in how it is valued.

A theory is a thinking position. It is a filter that elevates some matters and deflects or ignores oth-
ers. The operation of language as a “system of signs” is the object of semiotics. Everyday actual
speech is deflected. The “system of language” negotiates codes of already understood signifiers
that are fenced off from the specific moment of presentation. For artistic practice this translates
as a situation where: 1. Both verbal and visual art forms are read as language. 2. Actual speech
equates with the specific, singular, qualities of the art object, its marks, textures, dimensions, etc.
3. The actual, specific, singular qualities of objects are inconsequential to the systematic, ideological, meanings of discourse. This is the “methodological baggage” of semiotic theory and we see its influence frequently.

Stated dramatically, semiotics cannot ‘see’ the specifics of artworks, marks in a drawing for example. Such specifics are sub-semiotic. These phenomena are visual noise, inconsequential to the operation of the system of language. In semiotics one is always embedded in representation understood as a system of quotations because that is where one is available to theory. Is this a productive environment for creative work?

This exhibition begins from thinking otherwise. Artists must think from the specifics of work, whether those specifics are words, marks, or digital code. I see the central assumptions of a reduced and institutionalized semiotics as pathetically inadequate to the modes of relation present in creative practices: to what artists think and do. This semiotics requires that the artist is always and only embedded within a system of representations. Is this an accurate statement? Let us say for now that it is accurate, or somehow partially so. Does this then mean such representations are interchangeable modular units of meaning, or could some representations be fragmentary, allusive, decayed, or nascent phenomena, resistant to efficient normative meanings?

This is a telling question because it opens up the grounding condition of a semiotic conception quite differently. The modular conception positions artists as always and only embedded within a system of representations that can be sampled, collaged, and re-read. The resistance conception places artists into productive practice differently. It points to deeper tensions-- including that between the formation of art and an extended plane of co-present beings fundamentally unlike a discursive field of signifiers.
So again I find myself wondering about the practice of making art, with its consistent cycles of ‘blindness’, where one is always moving between seeing and not seeing, between figure and ground, between revealing and concealing. How do we understand this? How does this make sense for a theoretical perspective that has artists always and only engaging the already known and the already said?

I suppose artists could all be stupid, unthinking, situated automatons; passive conduits of historical eras understood exclusively as battlegrounds of ideological interests. I suppose they can be thought of as persons who manipulate surface effects with no claim to any further mode of relation to their production. I am stating this baldly, but I believe it is an accurate characterization of how artistic thinking is currently understood. I could become indignant at this point, but a more precise response is an overwhelming, tired, boredom that arises in me at such a reductive conception.

There are much more compelling ways of thinking about art making. Perhaps artists think! Perhaps they are valuable because they think differently. What if the practice of creativity was better understood as “growth”? Where matter and mind mutually move, proliferate, and transform, producing embodied mind simultaneously with expressive matter. What if the creative process was more compellingly conceived as a feedback loop characterized by resistance? It becomes possible to conceive of creativity as a situation where the resistances of a medium regulate thinking to rhythms of growth and decay, where dense and multiple frames of reference and sensation are diffused, re-ordered and nurtured: growing something unexpected and singular. As art becomes it carries forward its specificity across duration as a flesh between thinking and being, A form both singular and multiple, specific and virtual.
The difficulty in this discussion is its vast and subtle dimensions. To discuss Resistance to Vision in relation to creativity is akin to remarking upon the importance of water to biological life. It so surrounds us that we don’t often pay attention to it. I do think it is vast, subtle, and worth talking about. I think it requires us to keep thinking the aesthetics of the sublime. Our usual frame of reference for the sublime is to think position in relation to scale. Our smallness in tension with natural landscapes, or more recently technological landscapes, are two examples. This tension thinks what we are by thinking what we are not. Conceptions of the sublime evolve with creative debates. It is compelling how persistent and varied this idea is.

Can we conceive the sublime as a local condition? Perhaps the sublime is best thought as permeation beyond measure. Permeation suggests something that is conditional. Art continually challenges us to think and re-think our conceptions of knowing in relation to not knowing or not yet. Consider the sublime as conditional for a moving ground of thinking. An extended and articulated ritual of thinking made present by creative work. In this exhibition it comes to us through the practices of the artists included. Three categories of examples follow. They frequently overlap and lay out a series of intersections between “blindness” and vision applicable to the work in this exhibition.

Stephanie Sypsa’s “Internal Representation: Recalling Girl, Man, and Boy’s Face” consists of a set of three panels each composed of two overlaid surfaces with a small gap between. The degraded images of faces on the frontal surfaces speak of loss and absence. They picture something once visible but now only partially so. We must account for the persistent quiet violence of decay, but what I find so compelling here is Sypsa’s secondary response to this content. The panel resting behind is visible and we see through to another surface and another cognitive
structure as she uses mapping pins to attempt a further action, a systematic attempt to grasp at the slipping image. Incursions of invisibility occur at all points. The artist’s failure to master decay through multiple attempts speaks eloquently.

Margaret Whiting’s “Improve and Refine Diplomatic Science” similarly presents us with fissures and gaps between systems, structures, and intentions. Readable book pages presented in vertical segments are interspersed with horizontal segments where the pages are compressed upon one another in sedimentary layers. We can read some of this text, and see where someone has circled words and phrases. The text refers to reasonable responses to political conflicts. The sedimentary layers are unreadable and unavailable to reason. They have piled up, accumulated beyond reason, becoming something other, a mass of obliterated rationality. The reasonable content of readable text, something akin to a small voice of reason, is undermined and unhinged by the persistence of time where good intentions collapse and lose inertia.

Both of these artists set out to make invisible forces visible by creating a tangible practice of decay and disconnection while leveraging failed attempts at re-connecting, leaving us with
Many works in the exhibition are born of improvisation. This attitude sets out to invite disorder as a circumstance for new orders. It is creative thinking provoked by a willingness to let go of plans, to be blind to an overarching structure in favor of an emergent structure. Here resistance to vision germinates difference.

Ken Hall’s highly sensual painting “Red Invasion” is dominated by the sudden forceful insistence of a large flower-like form hovering within a minimal landscape space. The light is fleeting and the large central form is both flower and anti-flower. It is aggressive yet its identity slips towards something other, perhaps a strange, alternate body or organ. It does not dwell easily in this space as different orders of understanding simultaneously structure the visual field. There is a disruption, and dislocation of sense here, both identity and gestalt wholeness become and decay, producing inversions: webs of interpretive trajectories. We see thinking when we see these improvisations co-existing on the plane of the painting. We intensely participate with this image because of its sensual power. The work’s dimension traverses a collapse of categorical norms as well as our perceptual uncertainty, all while being an insistently singular object.
Improvisation, chance, and accident invite resistance to vision as a localized method for thinking. These creative habits regulate thinking, slowing down, redirecting, and preparing the ground for intuition. They open upon difference by proliferating pathways for creative possibilities. Richard Wollheim has written well about this experience. Wollheim describes the act of painting as “seeing in”, as a slow accumulative process engendering a suggestive state of mind. He contrasts this with less frequent moments of “seeing as”, where some configuration becomes a something, a nameable, measurable, component. To invite resistance to vision as creative practice is to learn to be blind to the nameable. Leonardo da Vinci’s discussion of staring into ‘stains on the wall’ link up with Francis Bacon’s statements on chance and accident, suggesting something of the long history of “seeing in”.

Images that we think of as factual naturalist documents display multiple and interweaving investigations where “blindness” and vision condition perception. Naturalist works of art are haunted by plenitude, by the sheer density of possibilities given to us in our perception of the world.
Art Werger’s mezzotint, “Requiem”, shows us an extremely complicated pattern of fractured and eroded rock formations above a fast moving stream. The overwhelming complexity of this specific place distances us from any reasonable and expedient efficiency in its image. Mezzotint lends itself to a meditative process. This place, this process, this image, defy normative conception and translation. Werger’s interaction with this task becomes as a mediation between forces both geologic and ephemeral: the fact of the worn rocks and the fleeting interplay of light and motion that those facts inhabit. This image, as a mediation that includes the impossibility of its own purported project, points directly to the resistance of the corporal world to our projects.

Henry Moore reported somewhere that sculpting the reclining figure was in part a response to waking up every morning with just such an animal. Though it is perhaps too flippant an observation, many of us resist vision in the mirror each morning when we see again this body, for which we must find some accommodation. Something of this interaction takes place in Joseph Morzuch’s “Self-portrait, Orange Shirt, Eight Days”. Eight, eight by eight inch panels redundantly display Morzuch’s episodes of peering towards himself. The interplay of constant and
variation is worked out by the overall consistency of his image, by the repeating format, by his orange shirt, all working against a shifting frame, provoked by variable openness at the top and distinct, subtle, slightly claustrophobic, placements of the head towards the bottom of the frame. The overall rhythm of repetition and variation give measure to the specific micro level choices, made mark by mark in his process of recording his accumulating perceptions. These recordings proliferate even as they enforce the neutrality of his project, defying our capacity for judgment as to what might be the better, or more accurate, or more truthful of the various images. These images arise out of highly specific seeing yet remain provisional. We are aware of processes of selection. But unlike a hierarchal selection that is deployed as definitive, or an overall systematic finish that disguises the fragmentation of vision, we have instead variation and un-decidability as a theme.

The works in this exhibition embody a range of creative orientations that map renewed questions about the relationship of practice and theory in art. Work grounded in making the invisible visible, in inviting disorder and improvisation, and, in enacting un-decidable, impossible dialogues with perception, serve as evidence of “resistance cycles”, in artistic practices.
Conceiving a “resistance loop” or cycle where “blindness” is coupled to vision, is way of thinking a kind of ‘feed back loop’ as a paradigm for creativity. A “resistance loop” should be understood to indicate an extended set of possibilities for structuring time. I think it is a conception capable of illuminating both the production and reception of artworks.

I will confess that I hope to find a way of leveraging a discussion of a depth of possibilities for art that is a move beyond the fixation with the surfaces of culture that is the grist of much contemporary art. I realize that the task in doing so is problematic if it substitutes one centering concept for another. And in a sense I am doing this. Though oversimplified, one could say that I am privileging time over language. I hasten to add that there are many ways to conceive time. Varying “images of time” structure different methodologies in science, history, philosophy, religion and the arts. I think that art making is very much caught up with such thinking. Here the idea of a “resistance loop” situates temporality as local to creative activity.

My goal is to complicate and enrich a pattern of highly influential theory rather than dismiss its insights. It is my hope that this thinking is a step towards realizing a moving ground for making/thinking/viewing that proliferates and changes with life. I hope to offer a view of the creative situation as an inclusive, multi-centered web of relations. A situation of diverse relations that yet remains a concrete relation to time.

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Erin Enderle (Cincinnati, Ohio)

*Purged*, digital photo, 11” x 16”, 2007
Nicole Foran (Cincinnati, Ohio)

*Sun in My Eyes*, printmaking, 30” x 22”, 2007
J. Brett Grill (Columbia, Missouri)

*Downcast Eyes*, oil on linen mounted on panel, 33” x 41”, 2005
Kenneth Hall (Oxford, Ohio)

*Red Invasion*, oil, acrylic, shellac on panel, 48” x 48” x 3”, 2007
Yumiko Irei-Gokce (Inverness, Illinois)

*So Much in Mind, in Mind Eye*, mixed media, 53” X 72”, 1993 (reworked in 2007)
Irina Koukhanova (Brecksville, Ohio)

*Onthogenesis I*, charcoal on paper, 19” x 19”, 2007
David Chapman Lindsay (Lubbok, Texas)

*Blind Faith (White Version)*, oil on wood, 14” x 14” x 20”, 2007
Nickolus Meisel (Pullman, Washington)

*Trycycle Magazine; The Buddhist Review Minus Images and Text*

papercut (magazine), 12” x 16” x 5”, 2007
Armin Mersmann (Midland, Michigan)

*Turf Composition III*, graphite on paper, 26” x 20”, 2005
Joseph Morzuch (Woodway, Texas)

Self-portrait, Orange Shirt, Eight Days, oil on panel, 8” x 8” ea., 2006
Kurt Nicaise (Covington, Kentucky)

*Between Earth and Sky 3*, acrylic, lime, mortar colorant on ash-coated paper, 39” x 56”, 2006
Yvonne Petkus (Bowling Green, Kentucky)

*Shift Work*, oil on canvas, 46” x 46” x 2”, 2006
Stephanie Sypsa (Columbus, Ohio)

Internal Representation: Recalling Girl, Man and Boy’s Face
Serigraph, mapping pins, and thread on mirror and panel, 17” x 55” x 7”, 2005
Kamila Szczesna (Galveston, Texas)

Transformation II no.5, ink, acrylic transfer, acrylic media on paper, 12” x 9”, 2007
Art Werger (Athens, Ohio)

*Requiem*, mezzotint, 24” x 36”, 2007
Margaret Whiting (Waterloo, Iowa)

**Improve and Refine Diplomatic Science**, altered law books, 10” x 34” x 2”, 2005
OF THE LAW OF NATIONS.

Of the nature of a nation, when once known and examined, must have inferred a broad strain of light upon the feudal institutions and the public councils of the European nations. We accordingly find that the rules of the civil law were applied to the government of national rights, and they have "constituted" variously in each of the modern instrumental laws of Europe. From the 13th to the 18th century, all controversies between nations were adjudged by the rules of the civil law.

Treaties, conventions, and commercial associations had a still more direct and visible influence in the formation of the great modern code of public law. They gave a new character to the law of nations, and merged it more and more of a positive or institutional kind. Commercial regulations and conventions contributed greatly to improve and reduce public law and the intercourse of nations, by protecting the persons and property of neutrals against shipwrecks and attacks, and against seizure and arrest, upon the breaking out of war. Without treaties were concluded, by which one nation was allowed to be so many to a certain extent only. Then, if in time of peace, a defensive treaty had been made between one of the parties to a subsequent war, and a third power, by which a certain number of troops were to be furnished in case of war, a compliance with this engagement implicated the auxiliary as a party to the war, even as if the contending forces were engaged.

The nations of Europe had advanced to this extent in systematic warfare as early as the beginning of the 18th century, and such a proposition was totally unknown to the ancients. [c] Treaties of alliance showed also the progress of the law of nations. The troops of one nation, to a definite extent, could be hired for the service of one of the belligerents, without affording ground for hostility with the community which supplied the specific aid. The rights of commerce began to be regarded as under the protection of treaties.
doctrine that war may be undertaken upon suspicion of a neighbor, under the apprehension that its further increase may render him dangerous. This would be contrary to justice, unless we were morally certain, not only of a capacity, but of an actual intention to injure us. We ought rather to meet the anticipated danger by a diligent cultivation and prudent management of our own resources. We ought to conciliate the respect and good will of other nations, and secure their assistance, in case of need, by the benevolence and justice of our conduct. War is not to be resorted to without absolute necessity, nor unless peace would be more dangerous and more miserable than war itself. An injury to an individual member of a state is a just cause of war, if redress be refused; but a nation is not bound to go to war on so slight a foundation; for it may of itself grant indemnity to the injured party, and if this cannot be done, yet the good of the whole is to be preferred to